

An Interview with Mr. Hector Ortiz
Associate Dean of Student Affairs

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Colin: O.K. Mr. Hector Ortiz. I'd like to start off with asking you about like when did you and your family move from Puerto Rico to the United States?

Mr. Ortiz: Uh, that would be my father ... and mother...

Colin: Your father and mother moved.

Mr. Ortiz: (Sighs) Tsk! I'm not quite sure when my father came. Let me see, I got here in '53.

Colin: 1953.

Mr. Ortiz: So that means that my father moved here two years before that, so that was about '51 ... '50.

Colin: '51. So your father came to the United States first and then ...

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. He came as an immigrant farm worker.

Colin: Immigrant farm worker.

Mr. Ortiz: He worked in Farmingdale.

Colin: Farmingdale, New Jersey?

Mr. Ortiz: ...New Jersey. Right!.

Colin: O.K. and then you and your ...

Mr. Ortiz: Then he eventually brought my mother, my sister, and my brother.

Colin: So that's how many brothers and sisters?

Mr. Ortiz: There's three and three.

Colin: Three and three?

Mr. Ortiz: I'm a fourth brother.

Colin: You're the fourth brother. Okay, then three ...

Mr. Ortiz: Three sisters and three brothers.

Colin: Three sisters behind you. Oh! Okay.

Mr. Ortiz: Well, I'm next to the youngest.

Colin: Next to the youngest. So how old were you when you moved?

Mr. Ortiz: Six years old.

Colin: About six years old? Do you have any remembrances about what Puerto Rico was to you?

Mr. Ortiz: Mm-mmh! It was very vivid! (Moves into a more comfortable position in his chair)

Colin: Very vivid?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, I always remember it. Uh, when I went at the age of ... The first time I went back to Puerto Rico I was already twenty-one years old.

Colin: Twenty-one.

Mr. Ortiz: And I went exactly to the places that I ... (Telephone rings in the background). Of course things changed in the interim, some of the trees were not there that I used to look for ...

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: ... and some of the other things, but by far everything else was pretty much the same. The canals that I used to go crabbing, and where I used to go swimming, and where I used to walk to take my father's lunch when he was working out in the field as a sugar cane cutter in Puerto Rico. And you know all that stuff was still there and so I went and proudly and very nice ... I took my wife and kids to show them more or less where I was born.

Colin: What part of Puerto Rico were you born?

Mr. Ortiz: Santa Isabel. Then now as ... then it was called El Destino, now it's Parcela Jauca. So its Jauca, Puerto Rico. Santa Isabel, Puerto Rico.

Colin: Is there an English translation of those names?

Mr. Ortiz: Uh, it's hard to ... names are not to be translated. But for the sake of translating. I don't think Jauca can be translated. El Destino is "The Destiny". And Santa Isabel, the best you can say is "Elizabeth" ... "Saint Elizabeth".

Colin: So you said that your father was working in the fields, sugar fields?

Mr. Ortiz: My father used to be ... Yeah, sugar cane fields. He used to work in the sugar cane fields and he used to drive a tractor that pulled the carts that they used to put the sugar canes on.

Colin: Was he in business for himself or was he working for ...?

Mr. Ortiz: Naugh, he worked ... Looking back now and understanding plantations ...

Colin: Plantations.

Mr. Ortiz: ...It was as if we lived in this small area where there were maybe twenty-five rows of houses. Pretty much similar, wooden houses on small stilts like. They were built on stilts, the houses in Puerto Rico. It would make sense so that the water could go under or whatever.

Colin: So the house was on the coast.

Mr. Ortiz: Uh, it's not near ... I was inland, but maybe like about sss ... a quarter to five to six blocks inland. Near the shore.

Colin: Near the shore, okay.

Mr. Ortiz: And then there was, you know, the fields stretched out, uh, the sugar cane fields stretched out for miles and miles and miles. Within that I remember, there was only one row ... in the houses. And then they had what you call or ranger, who was kind of the overseer or foreman of the whole area. And I guess the fields were owned by big time business men.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: So it was like having his own workforce who live in, near the worksight.

Colin: So you don't know if the corporations were like from the United States?

Mr. Ortiz: Oh they were! I didn't know then.

Colin: You didn't know then.

Mr. Ortiz: I understand it now.

Colin: You understand it now. Did your brothers and sisters help ..?

Mr. Ortiz: We belonged to one called Aquirre and there's supposed to be other corporations. Central, there's Aquirre and I think there is a third one I'm not ... I don't remember the other one two well. You'll probably get that in your history class.

Colin: Yeah, probably. We covered that last, on the last test we covered about the sugar corporations that came in there.

Mr. Ortiz: Did you hear Aguirre?

Colin: We didn't get particular names.

Mr. Ortiz: Central. There's a book in where my town is mentioned and my dad is mentioned in it. I forgot the name of the name of the book though, but it's in there.

Colin: Okay, do you remember if your brothers and sisters helped work for the family or they ..?

Mr. Ortiz: They were too young. They were in school.

Colin: They were still in school, o.k. So what was school like in Puerto Rico?

Mr. Ortiz: I didn't go. The year that I was to be .. to go to school it was too crowded. I had to wait another half a year, and during that half a year my father then sent for me. And I was the last one to come over with my sister and (Pauses to think). Just me sister and I. The other ones had already been here. I was staying with my grandmother.

Colin: You stayed with your grandmother.

Mr. Ortiz: Yes, I stayed with my grandmother for about a year and a half.

Colin: So when your father moved to Farmingdale, NJ ,were there people there waiting for him? How did he get to move ..?

Mr. Ortiz: It was a contract.

Colin: A contract.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. They (He takes a breath). I don't even remember the process. From what I understand it now, they went and asked people, you know, who wanted to come down here to work and there was a proposition made to them. They would sign the contract where they would owe a certain amount of money and when they worked that contract off, then they were free to do whatever. (He pauses). So I don't know if my father finished the contract or not. I don't think he did.

Colin: Oh. So how long did you live in Farmingdale, NJ?

Mr. Ortiz: I never lived in Farmingdale, NJ. (Shakes head "no" accordingly)

Colin: You never did.

Mr. Ortiz: No. By the time my father sent for me, he had already

brought my mother and all that. They were staying here in Newark.

Colin: They lived in Newark.

Mr. Ortiz: Magnolia Street.

Colin: So you've been in Newark all this time?

Mr. Ortiz: All my life.

Colin: All my life. (Glancing down at my notes)

Mr. Ortiz: I didn't leave Newark until the age of twenty-one. That was the first time I went to Puerto Rico.

Colin: (Writing in my notes) Went to Puerto Rico at age twenty-one.

Mr. Ortiz: And I'm talking about nowhere else other than New York City. (We laugh in unison)

Colin: So you are familiar with all of Newark basically or just what section of Newark is Magnolia? Which ward I guess?

Mr. Ortiz: Magnolia Street is in the Central Ward near 18th Ave. The corner of 18th Ave. Uh, I don't know if you know going towards ... up Springfield.

Colin: Up Springfield, okay.

Mr. Ortiz: 18th and Springfield crosses. Before they cross, about a half mile up to the left is Magnolia St. going towards Irvington. Most of my life I lived in the Central part of Newark. Springfield, 11th St. was about two-thirds of my life.

Colin: Was there a large Puerto Rican community there when you moved?

Mr. Ortiz: None.

Colin: What so ever? You were the first Puerto Rican family?

Mr. Ortiz: Uhmm. In that area, yeah! For the longest. Maybe three others tickled in way late in the sixties.

Colin: Trickled in the sixties.

Mr. Ortiz: Then, there was the committee ... the Puerto Rican community then existed on South St., South Broad, Church Yard, you know, all those streets back there near Symphony Hall. That area there. There was one where you're studying. That was the biggest

concentration of Puerto Ricans -- Rutgers.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: That whole plain street which is now University Ave. Bleeker, New, all that. It's all Hispanics. Puerto Ricans. Part of Columbus Homes, and 16th Ave. near Springfield, 16th Ave. by the West Kinney area. O.K. I don't know if you're a Newarker yourself or not.

Colin: I live in Hillside. Just up the highway.

Mr. Ortiz: Well, Springfield Ave. where Springfield and 16th meet where the West Kinney projects are. The projects there had a small Hispanic community, but within the 16th Ave. there was another Hispanic community being built.

Colin: How were you received when you lived in that section of Newark?

Mr. Ortiz: Uh! I think I was too young to form opinions and attitudes. I guess I just lived as a young boy does and if there were any animosities or attitudes toward me I guess my brothers and sisters felt it more than I did. I think they speak of it, but I'm not too clear on transferring those feelings for them.

You know, uh, I was pretty much an introvert when I was a young boy. So I don't know if that was based on my own ... or feeling of ... see I'm not clear. You see there is a gap (He laughs) in my life at that point 'cause I was here. It was a strange place.

I remember the first time I stepped off the plane. I had taken a deep breath. It was like just pre-, like September, August, September, maybe late September. I came in. (He shivers). I felt the cold lungs and I just ran right back into the plane. I started shivering and shivering. Since then, the cold and I don't get along too well. But I remember my bones were rattling from it, you know, I ... That I remember very vividly like I felt that all of the sudden my lungs just froze. And it was ... I mean I understand now because I still breathe the cold air, but then it was like I never breathed cold air. I never had a refrigerator at home so I couldn't understand the cold at all.

Colin: How did you feel on the plane ride leaving Puerto Rico for the first time? Or leaving home period?

Mr. Ortiz: I didn't understand anything going on because the people were speaking English on the plane. I just ...

and the gave us ... I think it was the first time I saw sandwiches actually being ... You know, the whole thing was like I didn't understand it. I was just a little boy, just looking and being led to where, everything that I had to do. (He mumbles and shifts train of thought)

I guess that I grew up pretty normal in the community that grew up in was Italian/Irish community. And I know that there were some prejudices because we did have to walk the long way around certain streets to get to school.

Colin: Seriously?! (I curiously raise my eyebrows) Which school was this?

Mr. Ortiz: And I remember being picked on, but you know ... (He casually shrugs his shoulders) Some of the kids were just bullies. I don't know if was racial or it was people being bullies.

Colin: And which school in Newark?

Mr. Ortiz: Madison.

Colin: Madison. Is that still in existence now?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. It was Madison Junior High then. Now it's Madison Grade School. It's not junior high anymore.

Colin: So you started ... Your first school was junior high level

Mr. Ortiz: No. Kindergarten.

Colin: I'm sorry kindergarten. And how was your English at that time?

Mr. Ortiz: I didn't know English.

Colin: Didn't know English at all.

Mr. Ortiz: No. I don't think I knew English until the fourth grade.

Colin: They had Hispanic teachers or just people who spoke Spanish...?

Mr. Ortiz: None.

Colin: None at all? So that you forced to learn the language like that.

Mr. Ortiz: Forced to learn.

Colin: Forced to learn.

Mr. Ortiz: (He loudly chuckles) I don't think the language was the question I was just forced to learn.

Colin: Was there anybody in your household that spoke fluent English?

Mr. Ortiz: No.

Colin: So everybody had to start from ground zero.

Mr. Ortiz: Right.

Colin: So how was it adjusting to a new culture and language?

Mr. Ortiz: It was easier for me than my brothers, my older brothers and sisters.

Colin: Because kindergarten is the beginning step anyway. You're just learning to put things together. How old were your oldest brothers and sisters were they high school age?

Mr. Ortiz: (Sighs) Maybe already fifth, sixth, seventh, and ready to go into the high schools. They never made it (Pauses). I was the only high school graduate other than my younger brother. I'm the only one that finished college.

Colin: The only one to finish college. (I nod to myself. Impressive) Which high school did you move onto after grammar school?

Mr. Ortiz: Central.

Colin: Central High School.

Mr. Ortiz: Across the street from where you are. By that time, I lived downtown. James Street. Which is up University Ave. where you get to the Garden Restaurant up there. That's James Street.

Colin: Was your mother working at this time when you were living in Newark?

Mr. Ortiz: Yes. My mother used to work in a laundry mat.

Colin: Did any of your older brothers and sisters help out after you moved?

Mr. Ortiz: My older brother quit school. He made it through high school. South Side. I think he was really the last one to come. I'm not sure if he was here or if he was the last one to come. (Mumbles) I need to ask him.

Colin: What kind of class situation were you in Newark? Was it middle class or working class area would you say?

Mr. Ortiz: There were a lot of home owners there, so I would say But it was working class home owners. They were not middle class. They were lower-middle.

Colin: Lower-middle.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. If I were to classify them now, they would be like lower-middle class. They owned their own home and you know ...We used to rent though. We rented a house. It wasn't a full house, but they had a house that we rented ...

Colin: It was like a duplex. Those two family things.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. I think it was a one family turned into a two family.

Colin: I know what you're talking about. When did you start looking for a job? What was your first job experience that you can remember?

Mr. Ortiz: After Central High School. I worked for Shawn Manufacture. It was a punch press outfit. Do you know what a punch press is?

Colin: No, not really.

Mr. Ortiz: Most things that are made from die. The die is the thing that they make so they can cut out pieces and leave the imprint, for instance.

(He gets up from his chair and stands by his desks. He finds a black stamp pad and opens it. He then continues with his description of the die process.)

Looking at this here (ref. stamp pad). This could just be a flat sheet of metal, and with the punch press the flat sheet will be cut out into different flaps and it will just cut it. Chh! Chh! Chh!
(He makes chopping motions with his hand) Then another die, or at the same time when they cut, the die will imprint it so that it bent into this shape.
(He points to the round hinge on the stamp pad)

Then it cuts it out, and another die will make this here component. Curl it so that they could interlock. And this is all done with punch presses.

I could look at things and know which were done with a punch press and what was casted or what was forged because that's what I did for a while.

Colin: How old were you when you had that first job?

Mr. Ortiz: I was about seventeen. Sixteen going on to seventeen.
I graduate ... No, I was seventeen.

Colin: How did your parents feel about you and your first job?

Mr. Ortiz: I was working.

Colin: They were happy about that?

Mr. Ortiz: Parents are always happy ... (Bursts into laughter)..
when their guy is making it. I was married then too.

Colin: You got married right away?

Mr. Ortiz: Well not right away. I was single for about two
months, then I got married.

Colin: While you were still in high school.

Mr. Ortiz: No. Two months after I finished high school, then
I got married.

Colin: And was your wife Hispanic?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. She's Puerto Rican. From Jersey City.

Colin: From Jersey City. (Glancing at my notes) So you're in
Newark and she's in Jersey City how did you ..?

Mr. Ortiz: My sister, one of my oldest sister used to live in
Jersey City and I met her at a party at one of my
sisters.

Colin: Do you mind telling me her name?

Mr. Ortiz: Her name was Virgin Matos. M-a-t-o-s.

Colin: How long were you married?

Mr. Ortiz: About three and half, almost four years. I had one
child.

Colin: One child.

Mr. Ortiz: Alice.

Colin: Do you know where they are now?

Mr. Ortiz: Alice is twenty-one. That's Alice. (Points to her
graduation picture on my left)

Colin: Is she in school now?

Mr. Ortiz: No. Alice is living with her mother now. She lived with me until the last two years. Two years ago she went on her own and then she went to live with her mother. She felt that she needed to be on her own. Grow in a different dimension. I felt that it was important also. It was a mutual thing. It wasn't a "I want to get out of here" type of thing.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: "I really wanna do and I want to go on my own for a while." 'Well, go ahead.' Then later on she lost her job. "Well, I really don't want to come home right now. I want to stay with my mother and get to know her." 'Fine, go stay with your mother.' She calls everyday especially when she needs something

Colin: Right. (I laugh)

Mr. Ortiz: She has two different tones. "Pop" and then "Dad?" I say 'Whatcha need?!'

Colin: "Dad" is like "Dad" --- 'Yeah, what do you want?'

Mr. Ortiz: 'What do you need?' -- "I'm doing o.k." -- 'I'm alright. Now what do you want?'

Colin: (Chuckle) Yeah, it usually goes like that. So how long were you working at the press shop was it?

Mr. Ortiz: Mmm. Let's see about ... not even a whole year. I don't remember too clear. That was a long way back. Twenty years. After that I went to work for Investment Casting. And Investment Casting was .. they did casting. Then I dealt with molds.

Colin: But it was still metal.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, it was metal and it was forged. A foundry. I don't know if you know if you pour hot metal into a mold, then out comes the piece. Most pieces that are formed in molds were ... We were doing then valves and gattling gun pieces for airplanes and machinery, for big machinery parts ...big.

Colin: I know at this time Newark was very industrial. I guess along the ports ...

Mr. Ortiz: This was in Springfield. Investment Casting. Shawn Manufacturing was in Newark. That was the one that I used to ... the first one. Then after that was Investment Casting. In Springfield, NJ. There I worked for about three years. No, maybe about two

and a half years. Two or three years.

Colin: So at this time was everybody helping to support the family?

Mr. Ortiz: I was on my own then.

Colin: You were on your own at that time.

Mr. Ortiz: Once I got married, I was on my own.

Colin: You still lived in Newark after that time.

Mr. Ortiz: Hmm-mmh.

Colin: I understand through Professor Wagenheim and reading something about you in the Rutgers article that you were involved with Aspira?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, but that came much later though.

Colin: That came much later, oh.

Mr. Ortiz: I was a traditional Aspirante, like they call it. I was sort of an inductee Aspirante. Uhhh, after the foundry, Investment Casting, I worked for Pathmark General which is when they were starting. They were called Supermarkets General back then, Pathmark. And I was in charge of a warehouse where I used to be a shipping/receiving clerk.

It was a big warehouse, bigger than this school. And my job was to make sure that there was always room for the items coming in. I used to go up and down with a pad and move items. I used to get guys who would use the high/low to move items from end of the warehouse to another end. Then you had to codify them so that when they put them in this book and it came out of the computer, they would know how to pick them from the slots.

Colin: You were supervisor of that whole area? You had people working under you?

Mr. Ortiz: I was never a supervisor.

Colin: Never a supervisor.

Mr. Ortiz: I was just working on the dock, but because of the nature of the job if I needed to clear out a space I would have to tell some people to use the high/low group. 'Cause they had specified groups. We had high/low people who were pickers and I was in charge of slotting. That is, locating merchandise and

putting them where they belonged. And so that I was able to tell people, but I wasn't their supervisor. If they didn't do what I asked, I would talk to their supervisor ...

Colin: Okay.

Mr. Ortiz: You know. I guess I was at the same level, but with different specifications. But was one of jobs where you were able to tell everybody else what to do because that's what you needed done. And once when some merchandise was coming in, and I knew how many, the bulkiness, the size and everything else, I would always get the measurements. I knew how much room I needed in the warehouse, because I'm very space conscious. I would really, say "We might not get this one in unless we do certain things. We may have to store some in the trucks." Pour some back out, put them back in the truck.

And all that had to be codified quick so that they could put it in the books and the computer could run it so that everybody always knew where they were. One little number, and will be picking toothpicks instead of shampoo. Or something like that, one little number and your order will be wrong. So you had to really concentrate and know what you were doing. And I started there as a janitor and worked my way up.

Colin: So how long did it take you to work from janitor to the position you left at?

Mr. Ortiz: Four months.

Colin: Four months?! It seems like you were a hard worker, intense in that situation, but you said before that you were kind of introverted as a child.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. In Shawn Manufacture, I started there with the punch press, the machine itself. Puh! Puh! (He jabs punches in the air). That was constantly Boom! Boom! chopping out ... I finally moved myself within four months to a shipping clerk.

I went to Investment Casting and started injecting wax into this mold. The molds were first a wax piece which then was encased in ceramic sort of. Then the wax was heated out and pour out. It left and imprint so that they could pour the metal in and the pieces were cut off the big mold itself. I went from there in the two years ... I became shipping clerk there.

Then I moved to the front office as sort of a quality control. From there I quit, and went to Supermarket

General as a janitor, 'cause I didn't particularly care at the foundry. My father worked there twenty-five years. And there was always animosity in the union. I became vice president of the union there. I led two wildcat strikes, and I got into a very heated argument with the boss. He was giving me a hard time so I said I don't need to be in the same office with him 'cause he said I was too worker oriented. How can I not be worker oriented when my cousins and my brothers and everybody had went through there and my brother-in-law and my father was working in there.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. I'm going to look out for their welfare. I didn't care where I was working. You know, so I went to Supermarket General, got involved with the union there too. (Rambles) It was a better paying job and all that within there. There I met several guys who were college students who were coming on during the summer and work. Then, I supervised. A couple of them were telling me why didn't I go to college. Why don't I go to college? (Shrugs shoulders) Eh, never crossed my mind.

Colin: These people were at the supermarket area, that you were supervising. The Pathmark division got you interested in college.

Mr. Ortiz: Well, no, I would say that it's the workers ... the younger college students that used to come in there. They were kids to me.

Colin: Okay.

Mr. Ortiz: Because I was still married, and uh, they were just fresh out of high school working their summer jobs and going to school. I used to play basketball with them and all that. I felt like I was much older than them. Now, I realize that I was a kid just like them, but I had other responsibilities. I had marriage responsibilities. I was a father and they were doing what kids should do. What I should have done as a kid! I didn't let myself grow up. I just went straight from high school to other responsibilities, so I had no should I say adolescent life.

Colin: Do you think that you took on the responsibilities on too soon or ..?

Mr. Ortiz: Definitely. Yeah, I should have done like other young people do. Go to college, or if not go to college, enjoy life from a different perspective and then get married later on when you're really mature. I think I

matured ... I don't know that I ever really matured.
(Bursts into a giggle) Until maybe lately.

Colin: I would say that you matured if you handled those responsibilities so soon after high school.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, I did. I was responsible. (Mumbles) Maybe, I don't mean responsible, maybe mentally. I don't know. It's hard to say, but I know that I always thought of myself as being a man then. I realize now that I was not. I was a kid with man responsibilities

Colin: How do you feel that you handled it or not handled it if you feel that way?

Mr. Ortiz: I'm here. (We laugh in unison) My daughter is doing fine. I handled it.

Colin: So what do you think you got out of that experience? It may not have the place that you wanted to be at the time, but least you learn something from it.

Mr. Ortiz: I'm sure that I learn something from it. Uh ... (Conversation in background) ... Can't say hang in there 'cause I was divorced and then got married again so I can't say that I hang in there then. But then that had to do with the youngness. Uh, I stay with things, I mean I don't bail out. I'll sink with the ship. Maybe, that's why I got out of it. You know.

Colin: Determination.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, I would say that.

Colin: Do you think that same determination and perseverance got you to where you are now? If not family wise ..

U: What got me to where I am now was that.. When I got to college, I was a single parent by then. The first year, that is, the first year that my wife, my ex-wife were seeing things different. It was an either school or her kind of thing. She booked. I had my daughter. So I continued to go to school, and I finished.

Colin: Which school was this?

U: I started at Rutgers one year then I moved to Rutgers, New Brunswick to finish up my last four years. I met my wife, present wife, at Rutgers and we have a child. You can see him on that side. (He points to a picture of son on my right). Hector.

Colin: Hector, okay.

Mr. Ortiz: We call him Tito. He's twelve now. Now with her, you know, she's a different type of woman I guess. We've been fourteen years now together, and we seem to be making a go out of it. She works for the Newark Board as a supervisor and working on her doctorate. So there's a lot of commonality between the two of us.

Colin: And her name?

Mr. Ortiz: Eva.

Colin: Eva. (Writing it down in my notes)

Mr. Ortiz: I guess I changed then, you know, some what. I became a little more outgoing not as ..I started. I think the college experience was where I really started to discover myself. Discovering what my surroundings are And started developing my own opinions about life. Going back to your question is that what got me here, (Sighs) It was a big accident.

Colin: Accident?

Mr. Ortiz: Because if you were to ask me back ... I mean I'm giving you a little bit about my history. But if you were to ask me back at any of those points would I be the dean of a school, how could I tell you "yeah" and I even drove a truck during some of those jobs. I drove a truck (Mumbles)

...The are a lot of in between periods that I'm not telling you about like when I tried to get into the police force. I was trying to become an iron worker which would set up frame buildings, you know. And I did that for I while, but I didn't like walking across those beams with the wind blowing. And didn't want to become a police officer because I saw some of the things that a police officer had to do and I couldn't get myself to ... to that point so I resigned from all those things. And then continuing on to Supermarket General and then going to college.

So I say it was a big accident. (Stutters) And accident that I'm sure I made some decisions on it but I guess the destiny of it also prevailed to bring me to this point.

Because when I got out of college, my first job was as a teacher. I was P.E. major, physical education. I taught at Plainfield High School. Plainfield High School then I got r.i.f.fed. Reduction in force means that they had to let go of 200 teachers in the system. I was one of ..they say the last one hired, first one fired.

Colin: You were there for less than a year?

Mr. Ortiz: Not even a year. I taught one year at the school. There, I knew there was another good future for me because I was really moving in there. I was pretty you know, good. I enjoyed it. I was coaching and doing the things that normally phys. ed. teachers do. My ultimate goal then was to become a principal of the school.

Colin: A principal.

Mr. Ortiz: I didn't. I got r.i.f.f.ed. Looking for another job, I ended up here at Essex County College, and I've been here ever since. This is my twelfth year. I started in the admissions office as a recruiter.

Colin: And what year was that when you started?

Mr. Ortiz: Uh, let's see it was.. (Squints eyes. Raises head to the ceiling).. '76. So I moved from there to director of the Project D program here known as the Diploma Equivalency Education Program. GED program. And then I moved up here as assistant dean and now I'm the associate dean of student affairs.

So what do I owe my success to and all of that? To some of the people that I ran into all in between my life, because there were added people who were supportive. People who were supported of me while in college, who I guess saw something in me and they helped mold it. People who gave me support when I was down; people who gave me help when I needed certain courses...financial aid ..You know the government supplemental aid for someone who is either trying to take care of your child and go to school and all that. Your money is not there, then you just wouldn't go to school. You'll take care of your child

Uh, I guess the biggest mark that I can truly say is that there is a God. And I .. I'm a man of faith. I believe that the Lord has a .. I believe in destiny. That the Lord has prescribed my life and I'm living it and I'm goofing it up here and there for Him, but somewhere around He keeps me in line.

Colin: Put's you right back on track.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, he puts me right on track. And I know that I have steered away many times. I'm not pure. There's no purity here. By the same time, I know that the way He's been. So.. I believe in that tenet that as stated in the Bible that they Lord will help those help themselves. So you know I've helped myself. I

have not sat back and received this. I mean I don't it to sound that way.

Colin: Mmh-mmh.

Mr. Ortiz: Because I have put forth energy and sacrificed many things ... many things that I value. Things that I put aside. Pride and all of that to get to where I am. But, and in doing so it seems so easy. I seems like I've done it so easy but I know it was a h-hard trail. But because... I guess... (Pauses) .. If someone else were to do it, I would say "God, you had to do all that." You know, there were times when I lived in my car. Like I said there's a whole lot. You can never reduce your life to the little particular things that you did. When my daughter and I lived in a car before 'cause there was no dorming room.

Colin: Ummh!

Mr. Ortiz: And you know, I guess it was hard but I don't even look at those things. I guess they were important at that moment. They're not important anymore. And if there was any advice I had to give I'd say "Hey! You just keep working at it little by little. Don't give it up! And those things will just kind of fall behind you as you go along. I guess it would only hurt if you failed at it. If you stopped. Then you dwell, but I'm not dwelling on anything because I had my downs also. I've failed at certain things that I wanted to do, but I just find that it's part of life.

Colin: It's a continuing process of change and growth and ..

Mr. Ortiz: I don't know what's going to happen to me the next five or ten years ...

Colin: Or five, ten minutes.

Mr. Ortiz: Exactly. You know, so I can't say will I continue to be dean here or ...

Colin: What made you choose..physical education was your major at Rutgers?

Mr. Ortiz: Well, I was interested in sports. From one to ten as an athlete, I was about a five or four.

Colin: Five or four? What kind of sports did you play?

Mr. Ortiz: I would be chosen like third. (Laughs) You know, how you choose sides.

Colin: Uh-huh! (Verging on laughter)

Mr. Ortiz: I would be.. If there were eight, I would be chosen third or fourth. I would not be first choice, but but I would not be the last choice either. I was in the middle somewhere. You know.

Colin: What were your best sports?

Mr. Ortiz: Basketball, baseball, soccer, and swimming and football.

Colin: So you learned most of those games over here?

Mr. Ortiz: Even though I was good in football, I didn't want to play it.

Colin: Didn't want to play it?!

Mr. Ortiz: I don't like to get hit.

Colin: (I chuckle in agreement) I hear you. You didn't play at all for the high school team.

Mr. Ortiz: I played soccer and baseball.

Colin: Soccer and baseball. That gave you the idea at Rutgers.

Mr. Ortiz: No. That was just that I had to make a choice of a major. So I chose something that I enjoyed doing. That was physical things.

Colin: Were there many Puerto Rican or Hispanic students in the Rutgers system at that time? Or in college that you know of?

Mr. Ortiz: Not really. I think there was about .. visibly, maybe ten.

Colin: Maybe ten. Was there any experience that you could get out of that or was not that a problem trying to get your cultural or ethnic identity in a school where you are not in the majority per se? Or it's not the same home situation.

Mr. Ortiz: I became an activist in college. I was a pacifist before I went to college. I was just a worker. I was just working hard and making money and trying to take care of my family. When I reached college, I had only my daughter to take care of and then I got into discussions. Political discussions of community concern and I began to understand community needs, in that sense, and therefore I became an activist to try represent the interests of the Hispanic community.

We talked about the issues that we had been slighted on.

Colin: What organizations did you have to join?

Mr. Ortiz: I then joined the Puerto Rican Organization, which is still in existence. I was one of the people who helped found it. I maintained it to a point where we grew and then ...I don't know what's been happening with it lately. (Mumbles) Putting input and statements

Colin: So what were you trying .. what was your platform more or less at that time? Was it admissions or..?

Mr. Ortiz: Admissions. Faculty and student body. Admissions .. and uh .. relevant courses.

Colin: Relevant courses.

Mr. Ortiz: Puerto Rican Studies.

Colin: That all came out after your foundation. Did you reach out to the community while you were in college?

Mr. Ortiz: Can't do anything without reaching out to the community!

Colin: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Ortiz: For the Hispanic studies, students the community is their support. Those who do not want to think all that and can make it on their own, some do. That's o.k. but you always need to reach out to the community support. That community base has to be there in order for ...

... It kind of puts the college in check. Right now it's not as visible as it was, but it's as subtle. The community is out there, you know, and you can do whatever you want but sooner or later if, with the right stirring the community will come into a college. It just takes the right people to move it.

Colin: Was there any particular organization in the community that was working with the students or ..?

Mr. Ortiz: Then, with the students? Aspira, came out also. That was when the question you asked me was I an Aspirante? Well, Aspira came out. Aspira worked with counselling younger students who were in high school and all that. I was already in college and I became sort of an Aspirante as a sponsor of a monetary scholarship of \$400. I then they gave me a pin saying I was dubbed an Aspirante, based on my achievements.

Colin: How long were you associated with that group?

Mr. Ortiz: Well, in that sense I was like I said an honorary. I was in counsel, continuously with them. They just contributed to my education in that fashion, but since then I've been associated with them on many different levels. Just from offering my services to ..seeking their services for other students that I know.

Colin: Did that get you interested in working with the board of education when you spent time?

Mr. Ortiz: Working for the board of education, it wasn't work it was volunteer time ...

Colin: Volunteer time.

Mr. Ortiz: ..as a board member. I was appointed, then later elected to the board. Uh, what drove me there? It was working in this college. As I told you before I was director of the Project D program, the GED program and in that program I was enrolling non high school graduates into the program. And I used to be the person who would gain them admission into this college and run them through the process. Took them through the period where they would accumulate twenty-one college level courses they needed to graduate from the program and continue the college years if they wished. (Phone rings) Excuse me.

Colin: You were talking before about the board of education.

Mr. Ortiz: Oh, yeah. In working for the GED program as director, I had to admit or deny students access to the school. It was ... Now this is an open enrollment school, which means all you have to do is be a high school graduate and you're in. There is no entrance examination. There's only a placement exam. So we also used to use the placement exam to screen out the project D students, because if they functioned at a very low, low level they would not have access. But there is also an age criteria, and that's what brought me to the board.

A lot of fifteen, sixteen year olds. The age ..the age had to be eighteen, that was the chronological age that they had to be to come into the school or else they had to be denied admission. That was done so that a student would not quit the traditional school, the high school just so they could get into Essex County College, finish their GED, and continue the college.

What happened was that a lot of kids would come in not knowing all those rules and say quit their schools then find out that they need to go to school, but don't want to go to their regular, traditional school. They come to Essex County College and they hear about the other people running through the GED program and all of that. Plus they get financial assistance and so on. You know, it's another means of support. You don't have nothing else at home.

And in doing so, I found so many young fifteen and sixteen year olds and that bothered me because I used to have to deny them. But there was no other place for them to go. The adult learning program maybe, which is the same thing and they would not continue in school. I felt something was wrong. Something's wrong with the system in Newark. I knew there was always, but I kind of never ..

And in questioning it, I questioned one person and he said to me "Why don't you become a board member and see if you can change it?" And then, at that point, you know, I was very naive to a lot of the system. The components of the system.

Colin: Politics and such.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, I didn't understand what a board member was about. The more I found out about it, I said "Hey, maybe that is the point." So I began taking an interest in becoming a board member. I didn't become a board member right away because I showed an interest. I wrote a few letters to the mayor saying that I know that he had to appoint people and I said I was interested in becoming a board member.

I didn't understand the tie in with the political, politicalness of it. I just thought that I had interest. I'm an educator. "Name me when you have a slot!" I never understood all the political things that .. that other people would have to say "Yeah, he's okay" or so on and so on. You know, respect your credentials in order to get into there as an appointee.

And uhm, eventually, after several other people were put in, one person resigned and they needed someone.. I guess I was the least political controversial person that they ... my community could have decided on saying "Yeah, let Ortiz in." By that time, I think people had also taken notice of me in my abilities at the college here. Some of my political input within the community.

Then I started realizing that I have to activate myself politically within the community that I live in. I'm going to be here, get involved, get to know the community, get to know the people, because I believe in self-determination. And the only way that I'm going to be a person who determines what is going to happen to me and my family is that I'm going to have to get out there and find out what's happening, so that I can dictate it to myself.

And in doing so, you know, I found myself also dictating a lot of the services for the community. Helping the community out with the little contacts that I made at different sub-levels.

Moving along, I got appointed one day. A got a letter saying that they were interested in getting me appointed to the board, did I show interest. I was appointed. While serving in there, there was some (Breaks into a giggle) political turmoil that happen. I think you might have read about all those things during the Ward Columbus Salley era ..

Colin: I'm not sure of that. What year was this?

Mr. Ortiz: This went on from 19..Oh boy!...1982 on. 1982, 1983. Til 1985.

Colin: What was the controversy about?

Mr. Ortiz: Well, you'll probably have to go look in the newspapers. Dating back now to read all the things that happen. He was one of the superintendents that came to the Newark school system, which then, they released his contract. He took it to court and won the case.

I was a board member during that era. They changed the system from type one which was an appointed. The community went out and rallied because they just had to get this guy out and they changed it to a type two and made the board members go up for election. I was one of the first board members to go up for election and won! And finally the community mustered enough power to even oust a person whom they felt, like myself, was not really there in the interest of the community.

They got other people to find out that type two is worse than type one. I was an advocate of type one because it assured a seat for the Hispanic community, where type two you had to get elected. We had never had an elected official other than myself on the board and at Essex County.

Colin: Never had.

Mr. Ortiz: So I was always trying to go for what was in the interest of our community and the interest of democracy, as people were saying. That it's more democratic to have people voted in. Fine! I believe in democracy in that sense, but it didn't assure the Hispanic community a seat on that board and it still doesn't assure it. So that the dilemma is going to be found this coming year. We have to depend on the machinery to put someone in there who is going to have to be dedicated to that machinery.

Colin: How large is the Hispanic ...electoral..?

Mr. Ortiz: It's about 80,000 in Newark.

Colin: 80,000!

Mr. Ortiz: And about 60, something of those are Puerto Rican. And the educational system is about 27% is Hispanic.

Colin: In Newark. The public school system.

Mr. Ortiz: Umh-mmm.

Colin: So they were responsible for electing you that first time? That 60,000?

Mr. Ortiz: That came out of my community.

Colin: As I was saying, what changes did you what to make before you got into the system?

Mr. Ortiz: What changes did I want to make? The first thing that I wanted to do was to address the dropout problem. Why students were dropping out at that young age? You know, what's going on?

Colin: Is there a high percentage?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah.

Colin: In the high school system?

Mr. Ortiz: Sixty something to 70%.

Colin: Nowadays.

Mr. Ortiz: It's still like that.

Colin: And for Hispanic students.

Mr. Ortiz: For Hispanic students, it's up to 80.

Colin: So 60% is overall and 80% for Hispanic students.

Mr. Ortiz: This is better than your class, huh.

Colin: Excuse me.

Mr. Ortiz: (He erupts with laughter) Heh! Heh! Heh! Heh! You can erase that part.

Colin: Probably, yeah.

Mr. Ortiz: It's the beginning of the tape.

Colin: Okay. So an 80% dropout rate of Hispanic students and of those Hispanics students, mostly are Puerto Ricans from the community?

Mr. Ortiz: Yes. The majority are Puerto Ricans. They just about reach the tenth grade ...

Colin: Tenth grade and then they just dropout ...

Mr. Ortiz: Let me draw in smaller numbers to give you a picture. If you take 100 students who begin in kindergarten, the total number. Then start tracing them up to their high school year, about ten to twelve will graduate.

Colin: Graduate high school and then ..

Mr. Ortiz: We don't know what they'll do after that.

Colin: And the eighty just get lost in the system somewhere. So what do you suppose the problems ...why are they..?

Mr. Ortiz: Why is it happening?

Colin: There are probably various reasons, but maybe you can point to things that you .. that ..

Mr. Ortiz: That you're going to find out in your class little by little. Socio-economic problems. Cultural. (Phone rings in background) Self esteem. Models. Economics that's the dot. Financial has a lot to do with it. They have to work to care for ... Peer influences.. There's so many. It's hard to attack it on which one is most crucial. I think they all are interwound. You can't isolate one and say that will correct it. You have to work on the whole global...

Colin: What were you going to work on while you were in the board of education?

Mr. Ortiz: (Sighs) I started working on a .. mainly on the..

..seeing that teachers (Someone knocks on the door)
Yeah! (Addresses his secretary) She'll take care of
it. (Addresses me) We were at where.

Colin: The problems you were going to address on the board of
education.

Mr. Ortiz: Well, I just started looking into the system as a
whole. Why is it that the students are dropping out?
And again, it had to do with a lot of the problems
that I mentioned that involved the students. In the
schools I guess was to make the educational ..their
educational experience a positive one. Trying to see
that teachers were addressing them, educationally.
You know, to bring up the scores, beef up the academic
curriculums.

At the same time, give them role models make sure that
there were role models available for the students.
Someone to relate to ... The counseling component so
that you can show them that support. Students need a
lot of support in the system. They need to be given
more importance. I think that students also needed to
have more voice ..what they wanted to see with their
education. And above all, not allow a lot of
political intervention within the system. Those are
the things that it boils down to. Again, we were
attacking them one by one.

First, for learning to take place, one of the first
things that we tackled was that teacher must be there
and a student must be there. O.k. If you're not ..
If you are out cutting one day and then the teacher is
absent the next day, there's no learning that's going
to take place.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: The first thing is to bring the two together. Then to
have some extra-curricular activities for the students
so they can have other things to try to get teachers
to stay and become part of that good old teacher/
student/family type of thing. Rather than just
teaching my five hours and "adios".

Colin: They are usually gone?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. So we're trying to bring that concept back.
Those were the type of things that we were trying to
do to reduce the dropout rate. Have more programs
for the students. Meaningful programs..try to get
cooperative education. Try to hire students in the
school system right within the school system. Working
in offices ...Exposing them to careers.

Colin: Do they have a co-op system within the high school I guess?

Mr. Ortiz: We began building one. Right now, to be honest with you, I don't know if the things that we were working on ..but we did establish some. I don't know if they still exist or not. My understanding, some of them were kept, some of them were just ... you know, cut out I guess. Cast aside.

Colin: Do you think that it's important that a lot of teachers be Hispanic to teach Hispanic students or ...Is there anything that you feel that they need a bicultural tie within the school system?

Mr. Ortiz: I believe so, but a caring teacher can also turn the student around. You know, having someone of your own to serve as a role model, that's a plus. But at the same time ... (Phone rings) ..having someone who's sensitive to your needs and to your cultural needs is also a plus. Having someone who is estranged to it and in opposition to it, is a minus. A lot of teachers in the system are estranged and opposing to it. So that's a minus. And I think the attitude prevails more than anything.

Colin: So what would you say to a person who would oppose that kind of approach, that there should be some kind of tie between the person's background and the school system? You probably have people who would oppose, say bicultural/ bilingual education, ...

Mr. Ortiz: That's continuous.

Colin: That's continuous.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, because it becomes attitude. For people to say, "You mean I can't do it?" No, you can do it. You can do it, but to speak to a Hispanic student I can probably do it better. Only because I understand it better, you have to learn it. Even when you learn it, you don't know it as well as I do because I lived it. And it's the same token for me to teach a black student, or a white student. I can do it. I have no problem. I have something to share.

I have something to give you, as a black man, but I cannot give you the black experience. I can only give you the black experience through my readings, and I don't know if you can truly except that I really know what black people go through and have gone through. No matter what I tell you. If you honesty ... Think about it. Can I really? Can I tell you what your family has gone through? And can tell you I read

Malcolm. Harriet Tubman. I understand a little bit about that, but you lived the black experience.

Colin: You can't get down to that individual .. since you weren't in that experience.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. I know about chittlins and the jokes that revolve around that. You know, I know the volatileness of the term "nigger" when it's thrown out, and then how it is kick around in fun when you guys throw out to each other. But I say it and I understand it, somebody else could come by accidentally and say it and not understand it.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: They might want to kid with you 'cause they see you kidding, but they don't understand that there is that cultural difference where you might object to it.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: You know, so, like I said there are some of us who are more sensitive and more schooled toward the other persons culture, but it's not the same someone of your own kind. You know, the offenses are taken differently (Background conversations become more audible).

Colin: Are there any type of programs that you try to get Hispanic students to do culturally, say after school?

Mr. Ortiz: Well, I just supported what was there. (Secretary shouts) I didn't try to bring anything different other than the special ed program. I worked hard in getting special ed children, Hispanic, bicultural, they were put into the regular program. And now imagine a kid who was special ed and then thrown into a regular program. It's like double jeopardy.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: So I worked hard in getting money into the system to address the special ed kids.

Colin: Were you satisfied with the goals that you tried to accomplish or did accomplish while you were ..?

Mr. Ortiz: Hell no! I never made .. (Breaks out into laughter) ...I was climbing Mount Everest. I think I climbed the first five rocks.

Colin: It's a start. It's a start.

Mr. Ortiz: There was a lot of community intervention and all that business. Politics took place because at that time a lot of the focus was on changing the mayor and so on. It was never about the school.

Colin: Right, everybody just ..

Mr. Ortiz: It was political. It was political interest, the city, the city's growth. How to change the sources and resources of the city of Newark.

Colin: So you said that the dropout and stuff was still a problem and different people and organizations are trying to address that.

Mr. Ortiz: It's still a problem ..

Colin: Still a problem. Is there any other problem besides ..

Mr. Ortiz: I do, you know, workshops on that and I have a lot of information on it here and there just to point the reasons and the statistics how crucial it is. But it still is a problem. Ssseventy-five percent to eighty percent of Puerto Ricans still dropout of school. They did then and they are now!

Colin: So you're a role model for you to have come from the same background and college, basically by yourself, and then come to this position. So how ..

Mr. Ortiz: I never said basically by myself. (Moves forward in his chair to a more comfortable position). Remember that I told you that there were other people in between there that did help me out. And not all were Hispanic. There were some, you know, black people that helped me out and there were some white people who helped me out. Uh, there was a little bit here and there. Those that I told you that were sensitive to my needs and then those who were those people who were people people..people.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: You know, there are people people! They can see you and know what you're trying to do and they can facilitate some of it. And they'll just facilitate it and not do it because "Hey, I'm doing it for this black youngster." They just do it because they're people people.

Colin: Right. (I smile)

Mr. Ortiz: You know, and there's very few of people by the way.

Colin: So while you're in the college situation now, how do attract Puerto Rican students to start thinking about college if they're not even thinking about, you know, graduating high school?

Mr. Ortiz: (Takes a breath) I don't do a program or I don't plan out. I do it more as I touch them individually. And I try to stress the importance of them going to school I try to map out how you can succeed and I try to let them know that in your quest, you know, I can be in your corner. Just let me know how you want me to help you. I can .. and then teach them through my network ..and how to network to get into negotiate what they want and what they need.

Even to go beyond sometimes having to deal with non-Hispanics, because once you ... I think initially you need that "Hispanicism", but then after a while, you know...

Colin: You just need to be human.

Mr. Ortiz: ..You got to get the string and tell them ... You got to be able to negotiate with the other people, but the idea is to teach how to negotiate that system. O.k. and how to go beyond that "Hispanicism". Because I don't need role models anymore. I think I have become the role model because I've learned how to negotiate the system for myself and now that I have learn to negotiate the system for myself my thing is to teach someone else how to negotiate the system for themselves. And I don't limit it to Hispanics, because there are a lot of non-Hispanics who do not (Chuckles lightly) know how to negotiate the system for themselves. That goes beyond the gen..you know, the gender.

Colin: O.k. So as dean of students you're in charge of taking care of the student services.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. I'm the associate dean. I am directly responsible to supervise physical education and the athletic program. And the physical education building because we do other special events. It's an auxiliary enterprise. In other words, it has to be self managed, self funded. I also supervise the day care center which is there to assist and give support services to the students who have children. The health office and the student activity. Of course you know what student activity represents.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: Those are the offices that I directly supervise. I

indirectly supervise the career resource, the admission testing and so on.

Colin: Is the day care operated all year round for students?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah.

Colin: That's good. And that's been in operation since you started.

Mr. Ortiz: Uh, yeah.

Colin: That puts you right at the top position to take charge of it.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, I took charge of it when I became assistant dean.

Colin: Do you like working with children?

Mr. Ortiz: Very much. You can see what my room is made of mostly right. (We both laugh, as he points to the various photographs and paintings of children around the room) I believe in two people. Children and old people. Everybody else in between I believe they can make it. Children and old people need to be taken care of. And I'll be getting old ... I'm getting older. You know, but that's the way I look at it. Not that they're helpless, but they just need a little bit more tender loving ... (Phone rings)... care, you know, than a young, buck like yourself. Excuse me.

(Here ends the first part of the interview. The transcription proceeds with second half concluded on the following Monday.)

Colin: Today is Monday, November 16, 1987. And I'm sitting where with Mr. Hector Ortiz, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs at Essex County College. Okay. Mr. Ortiz when we left off last week, uhm, we went through the gamut about stuff that you did in your life. I would like to now go back to your life in Puerto Rico. And on a personal note, I would like to know what memories do you have of your parents and how they raised you?

Mr. Ortiz: Well the ..When I recollect about the memories that I have my parents, it's pretty equal because I only spent six years in Puerto Rico. So it's very short years and very few memories and I guess only those things that imprint on a young, little boy is those things that will be vivid.

Uh, I remember my father as a ..He used to work in the sugar canes. One of the things that I remember was that ..It was very vivid is that I used to bring lunch

to him what we call fianbreras. There like little decks of, uh, pots that usually hook on and with separate compartments you can put different types of food in each without mixing them all. Fianbreras are ... (Somebody knocks on the door).. They were very common in the island. So, the reason why that's pretty important is because that is what I used to carry my father's lunch in to take to the fields.

He used to work as a ..sugar cane. He was not a sugar cane cutter. He was ..what he used to do was drive a tractor that used to pull the wagons where they used to stack the sugar cane on. I imagine at one point that he used to cut sugar cane also. And he participated in any realm, I guess, that had to do with sugar cane.

I remember that ..The reason why I remember that, well because one particular time I took his lunch to him which a considerable distance. I guess when I went back at a later age, it's like equivalent to a ten block walk in the fields.

Colin: So you walked ten blocks through the ...

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, at the age of five carrying this to my father. And I remember it being late in the afternoon, 'cause he brought me back home on a bicycle and on the bike, uhm, I got my foot caught in the spokes and then I (Mumbles) had around six to eight stitches

Colin: Ugh!

Mr. Ortiz: So he had to rush me from there to the pueblo to get. ..to get my stitch ..my foot stitched. And so I remember that being one incident and as my father ... I think another part of my father that I remember was a, one particular Christmas. My father, I thought came upon some money. I don't know, maybe he hit the numbers. My father always played the numbers. I don't know if it was that he hit the numbers or did he ... Later on I found out that he used to even borrow or should I say take ..sort of just put it on a bill credit wise.

He had friends in the ports so and..during that time.. I was born in 1945, those were like hard periods. It was just after the war, and I think that our small community was going through hardships. And he was able to get a bag of rice and this I remember sitting on the steps, a bag of rice and a bag of beans and he would give each person a cup from it. I found out later in age that that was my father just kind of took all that in credit and absorbed all that cost from the

town, because there was no food at that point, you know, for the town.

Another thing is I remember, like I said, during Christmas if he ..if he hit the numbers or not ... He went and bought toys for all the kids in that little particular part of, of the community that I lived in. There was only about twenty-five to thirty houses, thirty families, and each one had maybe three or five who knows how many kids. I don't remember too well. I remember only my particular friends and I remember them being older kids.

My father bought something for almost each kid in that community. He was pretty generous, like that. He was a very hard working person. My father grew up .. I guess, you know, believed in that old Puritan ethic. Work hard to make your money and take care of your responsibilities and your family. Uh, and then he disappeared. I guess that's when he came to the United States. I don't remember him ever leaving.

Colin: He was like just going to work and then you never saw him?

Mr. Ortiz: I never remember seeing him leave. I guess if he left he must have left at night time or .. or ..All I know is that he was just gone. I don't remember me ever questioning "Where is he?" I don't remember nothing in terms of when he came to the United States. I only came about finding out all those particulars after I grew older and started questioning some of the things that happened in between stages of life.

And my mother, of course, she was with us. The most that I remember about my mother was that she took care of the household. (He moves his head like a clock). She washed, she cooked, and she cooked and she washed and she took care of us. And then, she disappeared. And I don't remember that either.

Colin: So she was a housewife while in Puerto Rico? O.k.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. My mother was a good seamstress. I remember her always sewing also. She used to make everything that we wore.

Colin: My mom does that too for my sisters.

Mr. Ortiz: She used to make, you know, baseball team uniforms out of flour sacks for the teams in the town. And they used to bring her ..Now that wasn't like a job. I guess she used to get paid for doing it. I also remember (Pauses) Just really..no more than that.

My father used to always take us fishing. My father taught me how to fish for we lived only like six blocks away from the shore. We used to .. teach us also how to fish, not just catch crab but fish, and I learned how to catch octopus at a very young age. Do you know how to catch an octopus?

Colin: No.

Mr. Ortiz: My father taught me at maybe the age of five or four. Or five. I don't remember too well. But I remember him taking me out on a row boat and then there were these trees that grow into the ocean. They're like this. (Holds his hand branched down like the roots). Real long roots so that the tree stayed on top of the water, but the roots went all the way down and you can imagine a whole bunch of roots like threads like hanging ...

Colin: Like kelp or something?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, sort of just like this and the tree stub on top. And it used to be a good hiding place for the octopus under there. My father used to put a log to the tree, stick his hand in there and out of fright the octopus would cling onto his arm. And the idea was to catch them quick before they bit you because they have a like a beak hook beak to bite. And then you would take them right from under the hood, of the octopus, and invert the hood. Once you invert the hood, what it does is disarms the octopus' muscles and it makes him just go limp. (He suddenly "limps" in his chair).

Then you just put it in the sack and you go look for another one. But it was interesting how to catch it. My father always told me "Now, o.k. You do it!" And I would stick my hand halfway in and bring it back in. I never took ..I never got the courage to stick it all the way in because I didn't want it to cling onto my arm. He used to laugh. Those are the kinds of little vivid memories that I have of my father. Not much else

Colin: How big were these octopus?

Mr. Ortiz: Different sizes. Nothing like the "200,000 Leagues under the Sea".

Colin: Okay! Okay! I was about to say ! (We laugh)

Mr. Ortiz: Maybe you like ...you know, the size of a football a little bit bigger than a football.

Colin: Have you ever had a taste?

Mr. Ortiz: ..With the tentacles of course.

Colin: How does it taste?

Mr. Ortiz: Very good. Octopus is a delicacy in the island if prepared really nice. If you ever want to have some there's a place on, uhm, Mount Prospect Ave. called Santa Barbara that you can go to and eat some. You can go to some of these Spanish restaurants and ask if they have octopus. It's very rubbery like texture. It's like eating a piece of chewing gum.

Colin: And there was a time after your parents had gone to the United States. you lived with your grandmother and a sister who stayed behind ..?

Mr. Ortiz: I lived with my grandmother for about another year, year and a half. They left my sister and I behind.

Colin: Was it your father's mother or ..

Mr. Ortiz: My mother's mother. My father's mother was not alive, nor my father's father. I never got to know my other grandparents only my grandmother from my mother side.

Colin: And what was her name?

Mr. Ortiz: Her name Juanita. Juanita Perez.

Colin: Did you grow close to her since she's the only grandparent that you remember?

Mr. Ortiz: Uh. I guess. My grandmother when I came down here .. I think my mother and father sent for my grandmother around a year later after that. I wasn't ..I mean I guess ..I don't remember how close I was with her. I might of been. I don't remember.

Colin: Well. I guess your sister was there too, so she probably took care ..

Mr. Ortiz: My sister is only a year older than me. She took care of both of us and I think also that I had a cousin living with my mother then and as a matter of fact, I had my older brother too not just my sister. My brother is three years older than me. His name is Steve. So the three of us came at the tail end. My father brought three down first, then the other three.

Colin: And do you know which brother or sister you might of had a close relationship to whether age wise or respect wise?

Mr. Ortiz: As a matter of fact, the two that I stayed with I had

the closest relationship with.

Colin: Which were ..their names?

Mr. Ortiz: One was name Juana. I guess she was named after my grandmother. And the other one's name is Esteban.

Colin: Esteban is three years older.

Mr. Ortiz: About three years older than me. My sister, Juana, is a year older maybe two to one year. I don't know. Something like that.

Colin: And you said that you had gone back to Puerto Rico at age twenty-one.

Mr. Ortiz: When I was about twenty-one years old when I went back for the first time after coming here. I came here at six.

Colin: Did you do any particular activities while you were there or did you just see relatives?

Mr. Ortiz: Where in the island?

Colin: Yeah, when you went back ..

Mr. Ortiz: When I went back or when I was there for activities ?

Colin: When you went back. When you went back at twenty-one.

Mr. Ortiz: Vacation. Two weeks and didn't have much relatives there. Very few. I went to see, I guess, my parents friends. I stayed over one of my ..My godfather. I stayed over. Everytime that I go over now, I go to see them. My godparents.

Colin: So how many times have you been back since?

Mr. Ortiz: Ever since then, I've been back around six, seven times. You know, and lately I've been going almost every second ..every two years. So maybe more than that, but I stopped counting.

Colin: When's the best time to go, during the summer or winter?

Mr. Ortiz: Uhm, I went this past February. That's a good time. I enjoyed it, February. Summertime (Mumbles)
I think Puerto Rico is beautiful all year round. You know, at Christmas you have fun because it's not cold. And it's not hot, it's hot, but it's not real hot. I would say the best time to go ..It depends on what you want to do. Christmas down there is very gay type of affair. Summers are very vacationy, you

know, tourists and all that. February. I think I like February better.

Colin: So if you go again next time, probably around Christmas vacation, who are you going back with?

Mr. Ortiz: I want to go back February this coming .. between Mexico now at this point.

Colin: Go back with your family?

Mr. Ortiz: I don't have any family, other than a sister down there. I don't have anymore family down there. The only family .. On my wife's side I have family but not of my own . I have an uncle and a sister (Mumbles) He doesn't have any legs. They cut is legs off. It's been amputated, so he's been really bedridden. And he's, you know, just kind of waiting. He's been hanging like that for the past three years.

Colin: You've taken Alice and Tito back to Puerto Rico.

Mr. Ortiz: Uh, I told you that my son's name was Tito?

Colin: Yeah.

Mr. Ortiz: That's his nickname. His name is Hector. I took Tito with me. Yeah, he's gone everytime. My daughter doesn't...She's been there twice. As she got older, she didn't .. She doesn't care about going back to the island at all. It's not her thing. It's boring to her. My son loves it. You know, I guess he relates it a little bit more. Just gets a fishing pole and his grandfather ... There's a lake close by where by father-in-law lives at and since fishing is his thing he just likes going down there so that he can fish. He spends all his time fishing in the lake over there.

Then, you know, we travel and go to different sites. He likes horseback riding, and all that when we let him. My daughter doesn't care for it. She's too accustomed to over here I guess and never really attached herself to that world.

Colin: Now, I'm going to move to when your parents moved to the United States. You said that your father worked for a sugar company as a contract to go to Farmingdale, NJ.

Mr. Ortiz: (Stutters) It wasn't a sugar company. It was a farm. I don't know whether it was tomatoes, whatever they grew. But it seems as if he came as a migrant worker. My understanding is that ... There's a contract that they supplied the airfare and then they bring the worker over here and they would work for a certain

wage. Until the paid off whatever monies they invested to bring them over.

Colin: So he wasn't doing the same thing that he was doing back in Puerto Rico?

Mr. Ortiz: No. Maybe. He was farming. If you can grow sugar cane you can grow anything else.

Colin: Right. Do you remember how comfortable your family was? I guess socio-economic wise?

Mr. Ortiz: When.

Colin: When you were first starting out in the United States.

Mr. Ortiz: In the island or in the United States?

Colin: In comparison.

Mr. Ortiz: Well, you know, we were ..we worked ..Like I said, my father was a farm worker. Sharecropper, I guess, or whatever. He made his money based on sugar cane production. He used to supplement by raising animals I remember my father had a guinea pig farm which ..we used to sell guinea pigs. I don't know if people ate them or what they did with them but I think they were a delicacy also. People were buying them to eat them so we used to sell them. We had ducks and chickens and few farm animals. The land I don't think was his land though, only the house.

Then over here, in comparison, (Sighs) he was a hard worker. To down there I guess it's all relative. Whether we were richer down there or richer over here. We lived well in both places. When I say well, you know, we had three squares and a roof over our heads and my mother used to sew and make all our clothes. Here and there. I guess it's hard for me to place the values because ...

Colin: You were happy in both places.

Mr. Ortiz: I was. I remember being happy. I had pretty much a happy childhood. It wasn't ... I don't remember ever being hungry. I remember being well clothed and all that. I don't think that we were rich. I don't think that we were middle class either and I don't think that we were lower middle class. (Pauses) Moderate living. Just moderate.

Colin: And with your mom seamstress ...seamstry, I guess the word is, she worked with some ..in a laundry mat.

Mr. Ortiz: All she did there was iron. She used a big press, a steam press. That's where she worked at.

Colin: And how long did she work there?

Mr. Ortiz: I don't remember. I remember she had an accident where some screws were missing and the press came down on her. Kind of hit her in the head.

Colin: Was she alright?

Mr. Ortiz: Hit her arms and all that..Yeah. She's was kind of alright, nothing grave, but I don't remember her working there after that anymore.

Colin: Do you know if .. I read, I think in my history somewhere that when Puerto Ricans came here, say post-forties, that they .. a lot of them worked in the garment industry. I don't know if that was true in the Newark area.

Mr. Ortiz: I think she might of. There's gaps in my life (Laughs) during that time, you know. I mean I came to the United States and there's gaps there. I remember the house I came to, I remember going first class, and I remember moving, then I remember going to another school, and in between all there there's gaps. Those are unhappy moments that I refuse even to look at, you know, to even think about. I guess I had some unhappy moments, but I'm only treasuring the good moments.

Colin: Right. That's what keeps you going.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah.

Colin: And do you remember anything about your wages when you started working?

Mr. Ortiz: I started working at the age of nine. I used to work in Harry's Delicatessen. My responsibility was to sweep around the delicatessen, put things in order, take all the bottles and sort them in different cases. Have them ready for when the soda trucks came to pick them up. And sweep the basement and keep all in order.

Then I used to work in a food truck. Then I had a food truck job where, you know, you seen a food truck on a corner. I used to help keep all the cases in display and you tilt so that you keep all the fruits displayed and throw all the bad ones away. And I just made a few dollars there. And then after that, that's when I was a kid. I worked for those two people there for a long time.

Then in ninth grade, I landed a job with Stylemaster, which was a kitchen set place. Located on Sussex Ave. Well, it's located on Sussex Ave. and Dickerson St. And there they would, you know, we made kitchen sets. I was maybe around thirteen years old. Thirteen or fourteen.

Colin: Thirteen or fourteen.

Mr. Ortiz: Afterschool and I would work all summer. I didn't .. I only used to make the kitchen sets ..My two brothers worked there and I only used to work ..learn how to make them while I was there, but most of my job was going to get all the pieces that were going to construct the sets. Go pick up the frames, go pick up the seats. They would give it to me all by code numbers. Then I used to break cartons, break six of this, five of that and so on. Then they would assemble it.

Later on, I then worked on the truck going to do deliveries. It was a delivery truck. From there, I was in high school then. (Clears throat) when I finished high school I worked in Shawn Manufacture. Shawn Manufacture is the place where I told you about the punch press. From Shawn Manufacture I worked in Investment Casting. Investment Casting ..In between Shawn Manufacture and Stylemaster, I tried out for the police force and the iron workers. That was about a month, two months a piece. Worked for them Investment Casting. That's when I told you about the casting company. From the casting company, I went to Pathmark General where I worked in warehouse. Manage the warehouse...all the incoming merchandises.

From there, I went to college. I quit the job at the Pathmark, started school, and took part-time jobs with M & M trucking company as a shipping/receiving clerk. Part-time.

Colin: When you were working before high school, were those .. afterschool, were they like one dollar jobs or were they paying you like a regular ..?

Mr. Ortiz: (Takes a breath) Uhm, I'm sure I didn't make the minimum wages. And then a dollar seventy-five, a dollar a quarter job an hour type of thing.

Colin: But back then it would probably get you a decent ...candy, sandwiches.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, it was equivalent. It did more than candies and sandwiches. I bought clothes. I supplemented myself a lot since I was young. You had to keep up

with the steps, the styles. My dad had six kids. He used to work hard for himself, and I'm sure that he was just above minimum wages so when he couldn't do ..You wanted a glove for baseball, you bought your own glove.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: You wanted a bicycle. You bought your own bike. There was no "Dad will get it for me. Don't worry about it" He had other things to take care of with six kids.

Colin: So what do you remember enjoying ..buying..that you worked for , uhm, to buy for yourself?

Mr. Ortiz: One summer I worked and helped rehabbing a house that was across the street from my house. The return was that I could go with the two people that I was helping and pick out any kind of bicycle that I wanted. You know, at the job. I also remember buying me ..I used to really buy a lot of clothes. Sweaters, and they used to come out in style. Things, like I said, that were comfortable and pretty presentable when I went to school. Sneakers and a lot of sneakers. You know, and when you weren't allowed to wear sneakers, you had to buy shoes. So I just buy a lot of shoes. Just to have money to spend. Like I said, my father believed in the work ethics so he always believed that we should be working.

Colin: What kind of peer group did you have in high school? Since this ..high school is the part when you start to break away from your parents and be independent. So what kind of friends were ..?

Mr. Ortiz: Mmm, regular pretty much guys like me. Pretty much same type of families. I had a good mixed crowd of black and Hispanic friends. Uh, I don't think I had any particular white friends in high school. I did have some in junior high school.

Mr. Ortiz: That's mostly because of school I went to. It was a predominately black school. A very small percentage were Hispanics and whites.

Colin: Do you remember any big tricks that you did on the teachers or anything?

Mr. Ortiz: No. I was a good student and don't mean good, academic genius and all that. Most of my life I was an (The door slams) introvert. I didn't talk much to anybody. I was pretty much a loner.

Colin: That's what I wanted to focus on. How did you break out?

Mr. Ortiz: Break out of being a loner?

Colin: Yeah.

Mr. Ortiz: I never totally did. I just work on it. Uh, but in high school .. I got along with people, but I don't particularly remember ever having one close buddy that hung out with from the high school and raise hell with.

Colin: Oh, okay.

Mr. Ortiz: I used to have my fun in school ...in high school .. Once I befriended somebody I wasn't as introverted with that friend, but in over all, in a big crowd. I kind of always .. you know..crawled back into my introvertedness. I'm still like that. I'm real good on a one to one more than a whole crowd. There has come a time for me to deal with a crowd, and it's only in my later years, like very recent.

Prior to that, I have always been a quiet person. I didn't create too much problems in school. I was school oriented even though I had a hard time achieveing in school. Ever since my early grades, I really had a hard time getting the grades that I did. Just making sure that I passed.

Uhm. so ..I. you know, played one particular sport. I was in soccer, and then I tried out for the baseball team and mainly because I worked after school, in my senior year I did, I only got to play one sport that year. It's hard to then to take to these varsity teams since that was your only year and then you were going out. Usually, like, you play JV and then work your way up.

I a ..I don't believe that I had a below normal high school life, but I didn't have nothing spectacular that you can write a movie about (I laugh) you know.

Colin: Who knows.

Mr. Ortiz: It's kind of ..Just a regular high school..I was just a regular high school student. Pretty much on the average.

Colin: So how was your senior year? You were about to leave school and move out, either go to college or go to work.

Mr. Ortiz: Senior year I never had any idea to go to college. Going to college was something that just happened. (He pauses) ...Going to college was just open door admissions ... Going to college was three, three female students who were at Rutgers already walking by my house, sitting there having a beer. I was already about twenty-four years old. I was a father then, family person.

And they were looking for an apartment, and I told them where to find the apartment at ...There was an down the street from me. They went there looked at it and came back, walk by me. Stopped, talked again ...I started drinking the beer. I offered them a beer and they accepted and sat down and had a few beers with me. And they started talking about that I was an interesting person and stuff like that and I figured it was just rap, you know. Three girls, we're drinking beer.

Then they say have you ever considered going to college. I said "Not really." And they say "You sound like you can really perform at a college. Why don't you go to college? There's open door admission. You don't have to worry about taking these tests and all that. All you do is try out and as long as you pass your classes, you can stay in there."

Sounded interesting. That's when I was working at Pathmark. I said "Yeah. I'll do it." I was b.s. ing them. They brought me the application. They helped be fill it out. They said "Send it." I said "O.k. I'll send it." I put it right on top of the refrid-gerator and forgot all about it. The next day they came back. Well, not the next day, but a couple days later they came back they said "You know. Your application hasn't been in yet." I guess they were staying on top of it during that time it was the activist year about recruiting and making sure that there were more minorities that got into the school and so on.

They were activists. These three young ladies and they had started forming the Puerto Rican Student Organization. Two were Cuban and one was Puerto Rican

..uh..and ..when they came back the next time. they said "When are you going to send in your application?" I said "Oh, yeah! I remember. I meant to send it. I'll send it tomorrow." They said "Nah, nah, nah, nah."

Colin: Fill it out here!

Mr. Ortiz: No, they had already filled it out. All I had to do was put a stamp on it and send it. They took it in and when I got the letter saying that I was accepted, it was like unreal! And since the letter said that I was accepted, I took the challenge.

I went to my boss, told him that I was resigning. I was going to school and then I started college. My ex-wife of course didn't like it and that's why she's my ex-wife. (Chuckles) You know, and I just moved on.

Colin: Were you close with any of your high school buddies or ..?

Mr. Ortiz: I had ..yeah, I had some ..I guess one particular one later went into the Vietnam. And we split and I continued with my life, and when he came back he moved to New York and we lost touch. Only one person ...

Colin: So when did you graduate high school? Was it during the 'Nam era?

Mr. Ortiz: Three years ..Around two years later.

Colin: Two years later after ..

Mr. Ortiz: The war was like..The war was always there. It just started escalating three years after I graduated out of high school.

Colin: Do you remember anything about your friends being drafted or anything ..?

Mr. Ortiz: A lot of them. (Phone rings) I don't see a lot ... Well, in terms of the friends you were saying.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, so you know, I had only this one particular friend that I really, you know, was more close to. I was really friendly with ... I was always friendly with everyone. I think I was, uhm, (Cough in the background) ..even though as low key as I was in high school, which a lot of people now cannot phantom how was I ever low key. People who know me now would say "Nah! You could not have been ..."

Colin: Nah, man, nah!

Mr. Ortiz: You know, 'cause it's like two different people. I'm very outgoing now and more assertive and I guess that came through a lot of training when I became a professional. A lot of the workshops that I went to and so on that I noticed that, you know ..You lose out on a lot by not being out there. By not asserting yourself. By not making yourself known. By not being able to negotiate for yourself. And I learned how to do those things at skill building seminars. Leadership building seminars. And a lot of that had to do with a lot of insecurities. I don't think that it had to do with skills and all that. I think that it had to do with ...a maybe I felt some of those ..uh..How do you call it? (Pauses) Should I say, uh, I can't say that I felt less than someone ...Maybe inferior to a certain extent, you know. Feeling some inferiority not being able to articulate as well. Not being as sharp as the system expected you to be because

(Interview continues on Tape 2)

Because the early years of education, you know, I found this out later. ...I found out that there was a gap in my learning years. I never knew it and I didn't know if that was due to whether I didn't understand the language, or being new at the school system or whatever.

I remember from around K to the fifth, sixth grade ..I don't know if I was learning or participating as much in class or how much did I lose out by not knowing the language. 'Cause I knew I didn't know the language.

Colin: You were still having difficulties after six years in the system?

Mr. Ortiz: Well, yeah. I had difficulties through my whole schooling. You know, but I was wondering ...a lot of times, like I said, that inferiority complex about not being able to function as well in school so college was something that I never thought about.

I think that's why I became and introvert because of errors that I made. I remember one thing that was vivid in my life in talking about language difficulties. One thing that I remember made me that way. More quiet in class, was because at one time I made a real error. It was funny. It's funny now. Then it was like traumatic for me. Having a small ego.

I remember it being very open and everybody was

jovial in the class. So I decided to be jovial too and think that it was the first time that I said something. It was very warm out and I guess summer was coming in and all that. I think this was the first or second grade. And I said "Boy! It's hat outside!" and everybody broke out including the teacher. (I laugh) 'Cause it wasn't "hat" outside. And everybody was laugh, laugh, laughing and I didn't understand why everybody was laughing. And then the teacher finally says "Hector, it's not hat outside. Hat is something you wear."

Well, I didn't even understand that. The fact is though I learned the word that I thought I learned right and I said it wrong, which was "It's hot outside." And that kind of threw me for a loop I remember. That, that part of my life is very vivid.

During those earlier years, but not too much else. Not too much learning, I guess learning did take place and I guess I learn the things that were being taught, but I don't remember the process as well.

I don't remember until sixth or seventh grade is when I started again socializing with the students. I little bit more. I used to more socializing out on the playground where with what I knew best which was baseball, and softball, and I was always a good athlete. So, that kind of compensated for whatever else I lacked where the students did always accept me. I guess being an athlete, I was able to function as a young boy.

Colin: You probably learned most of the language through your friends and speaking quote unquote Spanglish.

Mr. Ortiz: Most of it yeah like 90% of it Yeah. (We laugh). I don't think the verbs and nouns at that point made any sense to me. Pronouns and all that. I used to pick and choose and guess. And I got lucky at times.

Colin: Speaking of education, you had mentioned last time, about the attitude in the system and the dropout rate of Hispanic students. What do you mean by the "attitude" of the system? Do you feel that it's sympathetic/unsympathetic or just like putting kids in and letting them fall out?

Mr. Ortiz: That's the way I feel about the system. I don't know. Maybe because I see that there are solutions to the problem. Costly solutions, of course, but there are solutions. And I think the system's attitude is "Hey you get it if you can and I if you can't too bad."

Because there are those who are. There are those who are making it. And my thing is that we should deal with the problems. The social problems that exist to make sure that more people get it and not just leave it to chance. And there's problematic ways that it can be done. And there are people who can achieve if you give them an equal opportunity.

Sometimes I understand that the students house situations or home situations are not equivalent to other home situations and therefore they have a lot of other problems that most students don't have that interrupt their learning years. How much can we do about that? Well, I guess there isn't a whole lot but the school should really work hard in trying include maybe parents into programs for those type of children

Colin: They're proposing that in NJ now. All these commercials about how students, parents, and teachers should get together. Do you see anyway how that could work? Like ..

Mr. Ortiz: Not off hand. You know, that's something that I would not mind being a part of working towards, but in terms of my coming up with a magic formula .. I never profess to do that. I just only feel that there is all more that can be done, if the system decides to give it an earnest try. The system doesn't because it's easier not to do it and therefore they don't have to pay as much money either.

Colin: Do you see any people in the political arena now who are probably going to address that situation in their platform? I don't know who's running this year?

Mr. Ortiz: I guess there are. There are politicals with good intentions and there are others who do it to beef up their platform. To sort of make an impact with their interests, so that they can protect themselves politically. But I believe even when that's done, some good is going to come out of it. So let them protect themselves. I think that's up to the people to take the opportunity to say "If that's what you're proposing, Yeah. We want to except that responsibility and then use that person for their benefit.

What happens with most people nowadays is that they're very apathetic and figure "Well, you're proposing it. You come up with the formula and you promote it. Then you make it work." And it's not. It's a joint partnership. To make education work, it's a joint partnership with the entire..every individual and every citizen in the society. It's not just left to the people who have the interest only.

Colin: Are still involved in like politics per se? I mean, do you go out and vote?

Mr. Ortiz: I vote. Am I involved in politics? A .. I guess to a ..to a lesser degree than when I was running for office and when I was actually on the board. Uhm. It's not a deliberate action on my part, not to be involved. When you are out ..way out there and .. During my political campaign, a lot of my friends got kind of hit in the sense of losing jobs and marked. Squeezed. Uh, there were a lot of other things that could have happened. You, you know, job wise to myself and to the community. You make enemies. People you never thought would ever be your enemies become your enemies based on whatever reasons they develop behind other people's anti-propaganda about you.

They start looking at you .. questioning you differently because they start believing things that .. people conger up to down play your politics. So that basically, what I've decided to do is become low key to let people again start reevaluating themselves and me for what I really am. What I represent and what I'd like to see. So that people can understand that, you know, I'm in the helping mode, not in the hindering mode. And that I don't mind stepping aside for someone else who feels that they can do better or what to become, you know, the political leader of our community. I will help them out. Uh ..and basically to lick my wounds. Heal up. They say, uh, good things comes to those who wait, so I'm waiting.

I'm not .. a..I'm only ..I'm down but not out. (Laughs)

Colin: Okay. Are you involved in any social organizations or projects?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. That I stayed involved with. I'm involved in the Education Association. I'm involved with the Newark Collaborate Group and I'm involved with the Little League. I'm involved with uhm the education, you know, the Educational Agency. And whatever else that I can get momentarily involved for .. you know, when I'm asked for some specific service. I'm involved the Lion's Club and .. I think the Lion's Club and I do, like I said, projects based on need with other clubs and organizations.

Colin: Nothing particularly geared for the Puerto Rican community?

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, most of it is. Not that I'm only interested in helping the Puerto Rican because I think that the society as a whole ..

Colin: Needs help.

Mr. Ortiz: ..needs help, but uhm everybody else has a role for that, you know. Being a Puerto Rican uh, I try to help out where I'm needed. Right now, you know, my need is also to fulfill the need of my community.

You have black people to help with the black situation
You have white people to help with the white situation
I'm Puerto Rican. I want to help with the Puerto Rican situation. (He clears his throat) At the same time, not to slight the others.

Colin: Right.

Mr. Ortiz: I believe that people should be self determined. And the skills that I have learned and the things that I have learned in the system I'd just like to share it those younger people in the community so that ..In terms, they also can be successful and obligated to continue, you know, with ..with the community that they come from.

Colin: Pass down the torch.

Mr. Ortiz: Excuse me.

Colin: And pass down the torch per se.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah, it's the only way ..It's the only way that people are going to progress, you know. I believe that as a parent, you know, I'm going to give my son the best I can and then he in turn should return that to, you know, his children and so on and so on.

I also feel that each person has an obligation to the community where they reside. You know to see that that community stays progressive, that stays in good terms. That there's the type of services available to young people and old people and so on. I..uh.. you know ..there's utopia. (Laughs) But it would be nice to live like that, you know. And I feel that it's everyone's responsibility to work towards it, in spite of what the elements.

Colin: Okay. Speaking of family, I mean, what's a normal day in the house like?

Mr. Ortiz: A normal day in the house. Uh, I go in, kiss my wife, say "hi" to my son. And he'll say "Oh, I'm going to go across the street to my friend..or down the street" Uh, he'll be back, watch a little TV. We'll go out to get something to eat or we'll talk about things that are happening on my job, things that are happening to

her job. Uh, we'll plan for the next day. My son is very involved in sports, in soccer. We'll take him.

Most of our things really involve him. Take ..you know..Making sure that ..that. I guess when you have kids you stop living for yourself. You stop..You start living for the child themselves. And, uhm, I guess those things, you know, are routinish with all the other flavors of .. of strong family oriented love for each other that we have. You know, that the routine doesn't matter and we're never bored with each other.

Colin: Is he on the Little League team, in general?

Mr. Ortiz: Baseball also. Yeah.

Colin: Eighth grade?

Mr. Ortiz: Seventh.

Colin: Seventh grade.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. He goes to Saint Benedict's Prep.

Colin: That's in Newark.

Mr. Ortiz: Down the street. On Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Colin: How's he doing?

Mr. Ortiz: He likes it very much. He's doing great. He's an honor student.

Colin: Oh great! So how does the family celebrate holidays like Christmas? Or do you keep a lot of your heritage within the celebrations?

Mr. Ortiz: Well in Puerto Rico, there's not that much difference than the United States in terms of holidays. Other than there's no snow in Christmas. And uh ..Instead of Santa Claus, we celebrate what we call the Three King's Day which is Los Dios Reyes. It's celebrated January 6th and since it doesn't snow in Puerto Rico, of course Saint Nicholas cannot get there. So then best next thing is ..is..When actually the Christ child was given the gifts, which makes a lot of sense. It was by the Three Wise Men who came and brought gifts to the Christ child for his birth which is why we celebrate Christmas. And there was no Santa Claus to excite them ..In Puerto Rico, people tend to be very religious and follow that doctrine.

Uhm, and what they do is that ..the..To inspire the

kids, you go and collect grass and tie it up into a little bundle. You throw it under your bed and the grass is for the camel. If you don't have your little bundle of grass, you don't get a gift. You always thought that ..uhm..that, you know, that actually camels came. Floated from heaven with the Three Wise Men, they took the blade of grass, gave it to the camel and they left you a gift.

In my situation, I remember as a kid, we found out as my brothers got older ... We came down the steps, the kitchen was separate from the house in Puerto Rico and my older brother, since he started getting taller started noticing. And he told us that uh..my father used to throw the blade of grass up top of the kitchen roof, but you couldn't see it. The youngest one couldn't see it because it was not within eyesight. As you came down the stairs, then my older brother saw it and he said "How come all that grass is on the roof?" and you know ...The story was told again later, when we were older that that's how it was done. Just like kids now believe in Santa Claus, we believed in the Three Wise Men.

And I think that's about one of the few holidays in Puerto Rico they ... Halloween I don't think is as great a big deal as it is over here. We have other.. What we call Viesta Patronales where each home town has their patron saint. So they celebrate during that particular day of the month or week of the month and each town has a different patron saint and different times that they celebrate it at their plaza. Which has to do with like ..They have the ferris wheels and all the other types of games that you usually have at one of these carnival situations. And that's like a really big holiday in the island. I'm not real familiar with the other ones because again, I'm not there all year round. I only go to certain ones that are there.

Colin: But you don't throw grass under Hector, Jr.'s bed on Christmas?

Mr. Ortiz: We still ..We still...Yeah, we make him do that. He goes across the street to the park, get the grass, put it under the bed. And at the age of twelve, when he knows that the camels do not come .. (I laugh) ..he still does it and then we give him a gift during the 24th and at January 6th. We also go to a friend's house. We'd celebrate at the party festivity sort of situation every year.

And a lot of Puerto Ricans here try to keep the tradition. I think that the Puerto Ricans here try to

keep the tradition more than the Puerto Ricans down there nowadays. You know, they celebrate Christmas in Puerto Rico whereas about one time, it was strictly, you know, the sixth when you exchange gifts. Now they exchange it down there on the 24th. And I guess you could understand that a lot of them who lived here, go back and main...You know, they keep the tradition that they had here.

Colin: And what about birthdays and such?

Mr. Ortiz: Normal. We sing "Happy Birthday". Get a cake. Give presents.

Colin: Is there something where you have a sweet fifteen instead of a sweet sixteen? You probably did it with Alice.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. Is it ...Well. I guess, the debutante ball. That you in the black community more or less... I don't know if you're familiar with the debutante's.

Colin: No. I'm not familiar with ...

Mr. Ortiz: Well the blacks have this debutante where the young lady reaches a certain age. They introduce them to society through the debutante ball.

Colin: Okay.

Mr. Ortiz: In Puerto Rico, we ..we take our fifteen year old female...this is only for the female...and introduce them to society through a Quincenario, which we call a birthday ..at their fifteenth birthday. (Pauses) Now you have to look up for the debutante to know.. Your learning my culture, you better get some of your own (He laughs) !

Colin: Yeah, but I don't know if that stuff is through black sororities would go through that. Like my sister, she's going through that process now.

Mr. Ortiz: Yeah. It ... not ..not just the sorority. That was a way of introducing young female blacks to society the same way that we do through the Quincenario. Introducing ...It's done in the same fashion. At the Quincenario you have everybody tuxxed down and sort of mimicking the wedding without the bride and groom. It's that formal. And you invite all your close friends and say "You know, my daughter's fifteen years old now." And then she becomes a Senorita at that point. Sort of like reaching that adulthood. The Jews do bar mitzvah, where they ..for the thirteen year olds.

Colin: Okay. Now I'd like to talk about future aspects, your dreams. What would you like to see yourself doing, say five years, ten years from now?

Mr. Ortiz: I haven't set any goals in that terms. You know, I think I've been taking my years as they come now. At this age, any other year starts becoming a luxury. So that I don't really have any high set goal. You know, I just hope to live as comfortable, maybe gain a little bit more income so that I could leave some what more for my son and daughter. But I really don't have any other goal. I think that the only goal that I set for myself was political and again where again I'm not abandoning it, but I'm not pushing for it. And if it does come good, and if it doesn't, it's no big disappointment.

I think that I gave it a pretty good shot and I felt good about it, but I did. And if it comes, it comes. And if it doesn't, I'm going to continue to just maybe working the way I am now. Maybe, I might get involved a little bit more in start doing a few things like ...

What I've been doing now is I've been going to classes for graphic art. (Mumbles) I'm going to the Industrial School of Art and I think I want to get into the arts. Who knows? Maybe I'll start displaying my own art work, going into just pure art field as a part time ...Not a hobby because I hope to make money off of it, but I guess to project myself in the arts ...artistic plains. And I think those are the only goals that I have now.

Colin: What made you develop that interest?

Mr. Ortiz: I always had it. It's only now that I'm working towards it. You know, I've always had the interest in the arts.

Colin: Do you have paintings at home?

Mr. Ortiz: Used to. A lot of my paintings were a ..During the years of college and all that disappeared. Uh, I did one last night, but I don't draw with acrylics and oil paint. I doodle and I draw with pencils and I doodle on almost anything and my wife ..and on lined paper and she gets mad because it looks so good and then it's on lined paper. And she says "Why don't you do work, you know, so that you can display it?" and all that.

Last night I did one. I did it ..one for my brother. And, uhm, I just felt inspired to do something for him

and got down in the basement one day ...Pastel chalk ...The technique that I discovered by accident when I was doing the post up mechanicals for the class that I take on Monday nights. And, uh, you know, I had it innate. I never had it developed. It's just innate talent towards the art. I can draw. Do things... thinking about... I'm sure that I can get better if I take the courses 'cause there are technical things that you can learn. Mix colors and stuff like that.

Colin: Would you retire here or elsewhere in the United States or maybe back in Puerto Rico?

Mr. Ortiz: A warm climate. (He chuckles). Not necessarily anywhere. Wherever it is, I'd like to go where it's warm.

Colin: And what would you like to see for your children? What do they see for themselves?

Mr. Ortiz: A good education so that they can provide for themselves. Give them a fair chance, you know, at the market.

Colin: What does Hector want to be?

Mr. Ortiz: Right now? An architect.

Colin: Architect.

Mr. Ortiz: He'll change. Everybody does.

Colin: Yeah.

Mr. Ortiz: And if not, good for him because it's good to set your goals and work towards them, you know, achieve them.

Colin: Is he good in art like yourself?

Mr. Ortiz: Say that again.

Colin: Does he draw like yourself?

Mr. Ortiz: Lately he's been doodling. He may have ...If he's going to get into architecture he'd better know how to draw. You know, but lately he's been into doodling. The other day he drew... He's into these cars. Lamberquini.

Colin: Oh, okay.

Mr. Ortiz: So he drew this Lamberquini and the thing is that anybody who comes in the house, he says them the Lamberquini that he drew. He did a pretty good job

with it...for his first attempt.

Colin: And Alice is busy doing what?

Mr. Ortiz: Alice is a free spirit. Whatever comes by her way at that moment. She's not future oriented. School is something that she already did. She got it out of the way. She doesn't care to continue her education and she just works. She's working now at security at the international ..I mean at the airport here at Newark. That's Alice.

Colin: And your present wife is ..?

Mr. Ortiz: Supervisor at the Board of Education.

Colin: And is she planning to stay there for a while?

Mr. Ortiz: Where at the Board? Yeah, until they let her go I think. Sixteen years now. Seventeen almost.

Colin: I guess we'll close with any comments that you would like to record for posterity and probably any advice you'd have to upcoming youth period. Trying to make it.

Mr. Ortiz: Well, you know. I think ..I think that it's the young people who should plan more and not let things happen to them by accident like happen to me. It would be easier, you know. Uh, I think that they should become diverse ...I don't ..Nowadays everybody is training for specific things. I think that they should be ... They should have...They should work hard at one particular skill, but I don't think that they should limit themselves. I think that you should be open to many markets as possible, not to one thing.

And I also believe that perseverance does ..does win out in the long run. And then, I guess above all if you don't have the spiritual. If you don't have that faith in that there is that design and that there is someone that you can ask when you're by yourself to guide you and to ask you for, you know, strength and all that so that you can achieve and become a human being. A productive human being. He's always there.

I am a very believer of that. You know. I think that even in my absence of my setting goals for myself, I think that in my asking for the good things to come my way for my family and for my friends and all that. I think that's how this year the sense of progress that I'm making is coming around. You know, because I work towards it and then it comes. And that's about it.

Colin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ortiz: Thank you for choosing me for whatever reasons you
had. Heh! (Smiles)